

Thank you for the wonderful introduction. I'm very excited to be here today. It's an honor to be a part of a longstanding tradition. I want to take a moment to thank the IMSA faculty and staff, President Torres, Principal Bob Hernandez—Bob and I go way back and it's great to see him continuing to shepherd IMSA's mission. I'd also like to want to thank my family today who's here today...can you give them a hand? My son was very specific in wanting me to give him a shout out! So hello, Tristan. He'll be attending 4th grade at Avery Coonley in the fall.

To the Sophomore Class...the class of 2021, welcome to the beginning of what I promise will be the most transformative 3 years of your life. Give yourselves a hand. My first day at IMSA was August 22, 1997. As I think back to that time, I remember meeting my roommate who became of my best friends and we still rely on each other today as we did over 20 year ago. When I decided to change careers and go into medicine, it was my IMSA roommate that I relied on for help.

I also remember the feeling I had when I arrived on campus...it was intimidating for me. I wondered, did they make a mistake? Show of hands if you thought the same thing. I was suffering from imposter syndrome during my early weeks of school. But, I can assure you that they didn't make a mistake. You are here, because you possess talents and gifts that still have yet to be realized. You are here, because of the hard work put forth by both you and your parents. You are here because you embody the purpose and the mission of the Academy. So don't worry, you're in the capable hands of a community that's ready to embrace you.

To my juniors, the class of 2020! Give yourselves a hand! I will be celebrating right along with you at graduation as it will be a milestone

year as an alumnus. Twenty years since my own graduation...As you look ahead this year, be proud of your accomplishments so far. You've figured this place out, and you're probably already planning your routines for the Clash of the Halls. I remember junior year going by very fast. It was one of my busiest years. I was a student ambassador, actively involved in community service projects both here at IMSA and at home, I was on the Future Problem Solving Bowl team, and I studied for and took college entrance exams. So, get ready. As you prepare for the future, think about what it's like to be new and be helpful to the sophomores. It'll pay off later.

To the seniors, the class of 2019...give yourselves a hand! You're almost at the finish line. I know it's early for "senioritis". At least I hope so! Wait until the spring time. But, you'll want to finish strong. Be proud of the legacy you leave behind. In fact, that's one of the three topics I wanted to discuss today. When I was asked to speak about my time here, I thought about all of stories I'd share, but what's most important to share with you is the lessons I learned. IMSA is truly a learning laboratory. In addition to learning about chemistry, physics, and BC Calculus I hope you take the time to embrace what life is teaching you along the way.

So, I wanted to share 3 fundamental lessons that I hope you can carry with you beyond today.

Lesson #1: Be Your Authentic Self

The ability to be yourself is within itself a superpower. Let anyone who dares to know the real you be filled with your uniqueness. At times, this may seem hard. You might be afraid to reveal your authentic self or you may still be discovering who you are, and that's okay too. All of that

becomes part of your unique story. Whether you're from Effingham, East St. Louis, Chicago, or Naperville, your environment is an important part of who you are. Your family traditions, your friends old and new, and the experiences that helped shape you made you who you are today. When I begin my IMSA journey I was afraid to tell people that I was from Englewood a neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, plagued by many socioeconomic challenges. In that environment, I was raised by a single mother. I was afraid that that part of my home life would lend itself to judgement and that people would think that I didn't belong here. But it was here, where I truly discovered how to be authentic. To quote one of my favorite authors, Brené Brown, "Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen."

That was from the book, the Gifts of Imperfection. And as recovering perfectionist...I know how hard it is to let your true self be seen. But, I'm here to tell you that it can be done, let your authentic self show up every time and you won't regret it.

The 2nd lesson that I want to share is that you are in the midst of a powerful network—cultivate it and cherish it. Take a moment and look around the room. I mean really look at the person on your left, on your right, in front and behind you. This is your network, a group of interconnected complex systems that operates on your behalf. Within this room, right now is a future entrepreneur, doctor, lawyer, developer—and all around change agents. There's nothing like the network of your peers and the community that you're a part of today. So, be kind to each other. Cultivate relationships as if your life depended on it—you'd be surprised at the benefits you reap later on. I

have a few examples to share of how being connected to the IMSA community changed the trajectory of my life. Just a few months ago, I got a call from one of my IMSA friends. He was working for a start-up company and they were looking for someone to help them build 24/7 servicing capabilities as they launched into new markets. He said, “I couldn’t think of anyone better to help them than you.” I’m so grateful for that—it led to an opportunity to be a part of world changing technology and it was because my friend and I developed life-long connection while at IMSA. Another example...during my senior year I found out about an organization called INROADS. Their mission is to connect talented, underrepresented high school and college student to fortune 500 companies and provide them with summer internships. I applied, but I received a small envelope in the mail. Do you know what that means? For those of who don’t lean in, I’m going to tell you a secret...When you get a small envelope that usually means, no. But when you get a big envelope that’s usually a good sign because they want to share more information. So I open that small envelop, and it read that I wasn’t accepted into the program. I was in shock. I had good grades, and what I thought was the right experience, how can I be denied? But after reading the letter, I recognized the name at the bottom. Ironically, it was the same name of a college representative that I met while attending a college fair. When I would attend college fairs, I stayed away from the crowded tables, because I knew what those schools had to offer. I visited the lesser known schools, and this representative remembered me. He changed jobs and now worked for INROADS. I said, well I received a denial letter and I was calling to find out, why? He said, tear up the letter and come to our office. I bypassed the formal intake process. I was sent to an interview at IBM. I beat out

some tough competition and became the youngest intern in the history of central region. Talk about the power of a network...who would have thought that someone I met at a college fair would be the catalyst to my career at IBM. That connection changed a no, to a yes. Even a chance encounter with someone in the IMSA community can lead to great things, so don't take anyone here for granted.

The 3rd and final lesson that I want to share with you is that it's important to build a legacy. It's critical that you make every place better than it was before. You owe a debt to those who came before you to pay it for to those who come after you. It doesn't have to be some grand gesture—but it does have to be meaningful. You can create a student organization that tackles problems that you care about. There are plenty of opportunities to do that here. Find something, and make it better. When I thought about my lasting impact—it all started when I decided to get involved in the early stages of educational outreach. Because I believed in IMSA's mission and wanted to expand access to programs outside of these walls. I was amongst the first students to develop curriculum for Science Explorers, and then I had a chance to teach that curriculum during a summer camp. I'm proud to see that IMSA continues those summer camps and remains committed to educating, not just the students here, but the entire community. I challenge you to find something you're passionate about. Whatever you decide to do, you have an obligation to make it better, pay it forward, and see it come to fruition. I'm counting on your legacy to make an impact.

Before I leave you today, I want you to conduct a thought experiment. Take a few moments right now and image your future self, being authentic, cultivating your network and building a legacy. Then take

that thought and place it on your heart—and remember to carry your future self with you each day as you go boldly out into the world. Thank you.